

Preface

An Era of Transformation

Bhutan continues to draw on the wisdom of the ages that cultivated Bhutanese society. As today's leadership designs and constructs the transformation into a "developed" nation, the values and priorities have evolved but fundamentally not changed. On the brink of imperative change that will define a futuristic new era, the underlying primacy is sovereignty and security.

A century of Monarchy saw the growth of a small country that dared to be different. But the phenomenal achievements of the forefathers seem to have lulled the government and people into a sense of comfort that resulted in complacency and malaise. Given the current state-of-affairs, today's generation confronts discomfoting questions and contemplates critical responses.

With the vision to become a first-world country, the fifth Monarch, His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck advises the nation, with growing urgency, that Bhutanese society needs a new mindset and work culture, a shift from ingrained procrastination and indifference to action-oriented work ethics. The Bhutanese character must be re-tempered with the traditional *ngar* (resilience, courage, grit).

Indeed, post-pandemic Bhutan has moved into an era of dramatic transformation. Several significant national initiatives are underway to reform the government as well as society. Given that Covid 19 had battered national economies across the world Bhutan, too, was forced to struggle with economic recovery to drive a new vision.

A fourth government was elected between November 2023 and January 2024, to serve the Democratic Constitutional Monarchy. As the executive branch of government, this new team will lead the implementation of nation-building. Inspired by a Royal vision which is conveying increasing clarity, Bhutan will define a new phase of history with major reforms in government, the national economy, and society.

The new times come with collateral challenges that need long-term solutions. For example, the economy, yet to recover from the Covid crisis, needs a clear and relevant roadmap. An unprecedented wave of Bhutanese seeking employment abroad leaves services in all vital sectors temporarily understaffed.

At the same time, this is an opportunity to build a more efficient and resilient society. Bhutan is under pressure to adopt a new mindset towards development to adapt to the 21st century. And a new era does not just happen; it is designed and constructed, in this case, by Royal vision.

The spring, 2024, edition of *The Druk Journal – An Era of Transformation* – provides a comprehensive analysis of Bhutan’s current transformation with in-depth discussions on specific themes. Public servants, economists, scholars, journalists, and experts, present their views and arguments on all aspects of this historic effort to build Bhutan for the 21st century.

This issue of the journal looks at transformation in three sections: Government, Economy, and People.

Government

It was a first in human history that democracy was nurtured in the womb of a Monarchy. As the Head of State of a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy, the government and people look to His Majesty The King for the long-term vision to guide a government elected through party politics. Today, the goal is to reform the civil service into a robust, apolitical, meritorious, innovative, resilient, and driven by a culture of research and state-of-the-art technology.

Economy

His Majesty The King’s vision for a strong Bhutanese economy was one of the first Royal priorities as the fifth Druk Gyalpo. Since National Day 2006, just days after ascending the Throne, His Majesty has explained his vision for the economy:

“... if we begin to work today on building a Bhutanese economy designed for Bhutan’s needs, then just as we succeeded in creating a development

philosophy unique to Bhutan, and a democratic transition unique to Bhutan, we will be able to build a Bhutanese economy unique to Bhutan. You all are fully aware that in the past we embraced modernisation on our own terms and conditions. Today if we work hard and plan ahead, we will be able to build a Bhutanese economy for ourselves and for our children's future, once again on our own terms and conditions.” (Royal address, Sherubtse College April 2007)

In December 2023, His Majesty announced the start of the Gelephu Mindfulness City, a Special Administrative Zone, which is emerging as a unique approach to economic development in the 21st century.

People

Bhutan's national vision prioritises the development of society – the people, especially the new generation. Following a Royal Decree, the Bhutanese education system is changing focus with an emphasis on STEM, vocational skills, and a new Bhutan Baccalaureate. The De-Suung Skilling Programme was initiated by His Majesty The King to skill, up-skill, and re-skill the young to make them world-ready.

A historic Royal initiative is the Gyalsung - national service. The vision is to prepare all Bhutanese youth, from the age of 18 years, for the future. Gyalsung will introduce discipline, help youths to understand their own strengths and open their minds to opportunities ahead. One of the foremost objectives of Gyalsung is to forge a shared national identity that transcends social, economic, regional, ethnic and linguistic differences.

The new era for Bhutan has arrived.